

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA**

ANTONIO CRAWFORD,	:	
	:	Civil No. 1:14-CV-1682
Plaintiff	:	
	:	(Judge Caldwell)
v.	:	
	:	(Magistrate Judge Carlson)
LT. WHILE, et al.,	:	
	:	
Defendants	:	

MEMORANDUM OPINION AND ORDER

I. Statement of Facts and of the Case

The *pro se* plaintiff is a federal prisoner who has sued correctional staff alleging a variety of Bivens claims. There is a potentially dispositive motion pending in this case, a motion to dismiss or in the alternative for summary judgment, (Doc. 30.), which could substantially effect the scope of this action. This motion, in turn, has inspired the defendants to file a motion for protective order, seeking a stay of discovery until after this motion is resolved. (Doc.41.) Upon consideration of this motion, which has not been opposed by Crawford, the defendants' motion for protective order will be GRANTED. (Doc. 41.)

II. Discussion

A. Guiding Principles Governing Discovery Motions Practice

Several basic guiding principles inform our resolution of the instant discovery dispute. Rulings regarding the proper scope of discovery, and the extent to which discovery may be compelled, are matters consigned to the court's discretion and judgment. Thus, it has long been held that decisions regarding Rule 37 motions are "committed to the sound discretion of the district court." DiGregorio v. First Rediscount Corp., 506 F.2d 781, 788 (3d Cir. 1974). Similarly, issues relating to the scope of discovery permitted under Rule 26 also rest in the sound discretion of the Court. Wisniewski v. Johns-Manville Corp., 812 F.2d 81, 90 (3d Cir. 1987). Thus, a court's decisions regarding the conduct of discovery, and whether to compel disclosure of certain information, will be disturbed only upon a showing of an abuse of discretion. Marroquin-Manriquez v. I.N.S., 699 F.2d 129, 134 (3d Cir. 1983). This far-reaching discretion extends to rulings by United States Magistrate Judges on discovery matters. In this regard:

District courts provide magistrate judges with particularly broad discretion in resolving discovery disputes. See Farmers & Merchs. Nat'l Bank v. San Clemente Fin. Group Sec., Inc., 174 F.R.D. 572, 585 (D.N.J.1997). When a magistrate judge's decision involves a discretionary [discovery] matter . . . , "courts in this district have determined that the clearly erroneous standard implicitly becomes an abuse of discretion standard." Saldi v. Paul Revere Life Ins. Co., 224 F.R.D. 169, 174 (E.D.Pa.2004) (citing Scott Paper Co. v. United States, 943 F.Supp. 501, 502 (E.D.Pa.1996)). Under that standard, a magistrate

judge's discovery ruling "is entitled to great deference and is reversible only for abuse of discretion." Kresefky v. Panasonic Commc'ns and Sys. Co., 169 F.R.D. 54, 64 (D.N.J.1996); see also Hasbrouck v. BankAmerica Hous. Servs., 190 F.R.D. 42, 44-45 (N.D.N.Y.1999) (holding that discovery rulings are reviewed under abuse of discretion standard rather than de novo standard); EEOC v. Mr. Gold, Inc., 223 F.R.D. 100, 102 (E.D.N.Y.2004) (holding that a magistrate judge's resolution of discovery disputes deserves substantial deference and should be reversed only if there is an abuse of discretion).

Halsey v. Pfeiffer, No. 09-1138, 2010 WL 3735702, *1 (D.N.J. Sept. 17, 2010).

This discretion is guided, however, by certain basic principles. For example, this broad discretion over discovery matters extends to decisions under Rule 26 relating to the issuance of protective orders limiting and regulating the timing of discovery. Indeed, it is undisputed that: "'[t]he grant and nature of [a protective order] is singularly within the discretion of the district court and may be reversed only on a clear showing of abuse of discretion.' Galella v. Onassis, 487 F.2d 986, 997 (2d Cir.1973) (citation omitted)." Dove v. Atlantic Capital Corp., 963 F.2d 15, 19 (2d Cir. 1992). One of these cardinal principles, governing the exercise of discretion in this field, is that the district court may properly defer or delay discovery while it considers a potentially dispositive pretrial motion, provided the district court concludes that the pretrial motion does not, on its face, appear groundless. See, e.g., James v. York County Police Dep't, 160 F.App'x 126, 136 (3d Cir. 2005); Nolan v. U.S. Dep't of Justice, 973 F.2d 843,849 (10th Cir. 1992); Johnson v. New York Univ. Sch. of Ed., 205 F.R.D. 433, 434 (S.D.N.Y. 2002).

Briefly deferring discovery in such a case, while the court determines the threshold issue of whether a complaint has sufficient merit to go forward, recognizes a simple, fundamental truth: Parties who file motions which may present potentially meritorious and complete legal defenses to civil actions should not be put to the time, expense and burden of factual discovery until after these claimed legal defenses are addressed by the court. In such instances, it is clearly established that:

“[A] stay of discovery is appropriate pending resolution of a potentially dispositive motion where the motion ‘appear[s] to have substantial grounds’ or, stated another way, ‘do[es] not appear to be without foundation in law.’ ” In re Currency Conversion Fee Antitrust Litigation, 2002 WL 88278, at *1 (S.D.N.Y. Jan. 22, 2002) (quoting Chrysler Capital Corp. v. Century Power Corp., 137 F.R.D. 209, 209-10 (S.D.N.Y.1991)) (citing Flores v. Southern Peru Copper Corp., 203 F.R.D. 92, 2001 WL 396422, at *2 (S.D.N.Y. Apr. 19, 2001); Anti-Monopoly, Inc. v. Hasbro, Inc., 1996 WL 101277, at *2 (S.D.N.Y. March 7, 1996)).

Johnson v. New York Univ. School of Educ., 205 F.R.D. 433, 434 (S.D.N.Y. 2002).

Guided by these legal tenets we conclude that discovery should be stayed at this time. We note that the defendants have filed a potentially dispositive motion in this case. The merits of these claims are currently being addressed by the court, ensuring a very prompt resolution of this motion. In this setting, we conclude, consistent with settled case law, that: “[A] stay of discovery is appropriate pending resolution of a potentially dispositive motion where the motion ‘appear[s] to have substantial grounds’ or, stated another way, ‘do[es] not appear to be without

foundation in law.' " Johnson v. New York Univ. School of Educ., 205 F.R.D. 433, 434 (S.D.N.Y. 2002). Therefore, we will defer further discovery pending resolution of the outstanding dispositive judgment motion.

An appropriate order follows:

III. Order

Accordingly, the defendants' motion for protective order, (Doc. 41.), is GRANTED, and discovery is stayed pending resolution of the pending motion to dismiss or in the alternative for summary judgment.

So ordered this 2d day of April, 2015.

S/Martin C. Carlson

Martin C. Carlson
United States Magistrate Judge